WALK STOKE

Stoke Station to Tunstall

4.8 miles

Stoke train station

Go past Hanley Cemetery

Go past the Lock 38 estate

Etruria Industrial Museum

Toby Carvery on Festival Park

Etruria Valley / former Shelton Bar

Access to the new Wolstanton road

Middleport Park and Pottery

Longport (access to train station)

Westport and Westport lake

Greenway to Tunstall

Tunstall Tesco and cafe

Centre of Tunstall

PHOTO GUIDE

WALK STOKE

Stoke Station to Tunstall

Welcome to inner-city Stoke! If this is a first-time visit, you may be pleasantly surprised. There is a bit of grot... but the way becomes much more pleasing and indeed interesting. In fact, at times you may not believe you're in the city of Stoke-on-Trent. I say "walk", but much of the route can also be cycled — provided you carry your bike up some steps at Tunstall.

Of course, our big old city has many other 'greenways' (old mine and steelwork railway lines), canal towpaths, defunct train lines, and all the little 'ways through' that are known only to locals. This Stoke-Tunstall route is just one of our many off-road paths.

In this publication I'm using a new format. A decade or more ago, I photographed and made an ebook for a Staffordshire University to Keele University walk, and also a walk along the valley ridge from Kidsgrove back to Stoke town. These are available online, though they took the form of simple ebooks made with Microsoft Word. Here I use Microsoft Publisher, and thus obtain a more pleasing look — more suited to a 10-inch tablet.

This unofficial step-by-step walk guide was photographed at the end of June, with the original 2009 Sigma DP1 camera.

The resulting PDF shows only a bit of our increasingly green and regenerated city, which is a very different place now than it was in the industrial 1980s, the 'manage the decline' 2000s, or even in the newly hopeful and aspiring 2010s.

The city has built on the passion and vision of its longer-term thinkers — such as those who brought the National Garden Festival to the city in 1986, or who continually invested in the city over the decades (St. Modwen), or who brought the SUSTRANS cycle-routes to the city (city mayor Mike Wolfe) when local councillors were to be heard saying that 'no-one cycles in Stoke'. Well, they cycle now! Much the same might be said of current plans for 'Silicon Stoke' — build it, and they will come.

In the meanwhile there's a lot more to be done... and you can help with that. Everything from helping to get the Stoke-Leek railway re-opened, to simply taking care of your usual off-road path each week (tip: a good £15 'Helping Hand' litter picking stick and a large 100L bin-bag).

Non-car transport connections to Stoke-on-Trent railway station

Walking:

From the south: Up from Stone to Trentham, then walk via the river-side path from Trentham to Stoke Minster and the train station.

From the Peak District: Along the Gritstone Trail and then walk down my unofficial valley ridge extension from Kidsgrove to Stoke town and the train station.

From the West: From Keele University, walk my route via Newcastle-under-Lyme and along the old disused Market Drayton railway line.

From Leek: (A good walking/cycling path is coming soon, one hopes, running alongside the re-connected Stoke-Leek railway line).

Cycling:

National cycle-paths run for Birmingham—Stafford—Stone—Stoke—Cheshire.

Canal:

Excellent access from the Trent & Mersey Canal — see your canal maps and guides. Local moorings at: Lock 38 (opposite Hanley Cemetery); the Etruria Industrial Museum; the Festival Park marina; and Westport Lake.

Trains:

Fast regular inter-city trains from Manchester, Birmingham International Airport, Birmingham, Oxford, London. Stoke-on-Trent is a mainline station on the West Coast main line. Inter-city connections from Stoke to Wolverhampton are good, for transfer to/from Welsh Marches / mid-Wales services, or to North Wales for Llandudno and Holyhead (the ferry for Ireland).

Smaller local trains call at Congleton, Kidsgrove, Longport, Stoke-on-Trent, Longton, Uttoxeter, and then hum out to Derby / Nottingham for a service through Sleaford to the East Coast at the seaside resort of Skegness.

Stoke is not easy to access by rail from:

Walsall; Lichfield; Burton-upon-Trent; Shrewsbury; Buxton and the Peak District.

River:

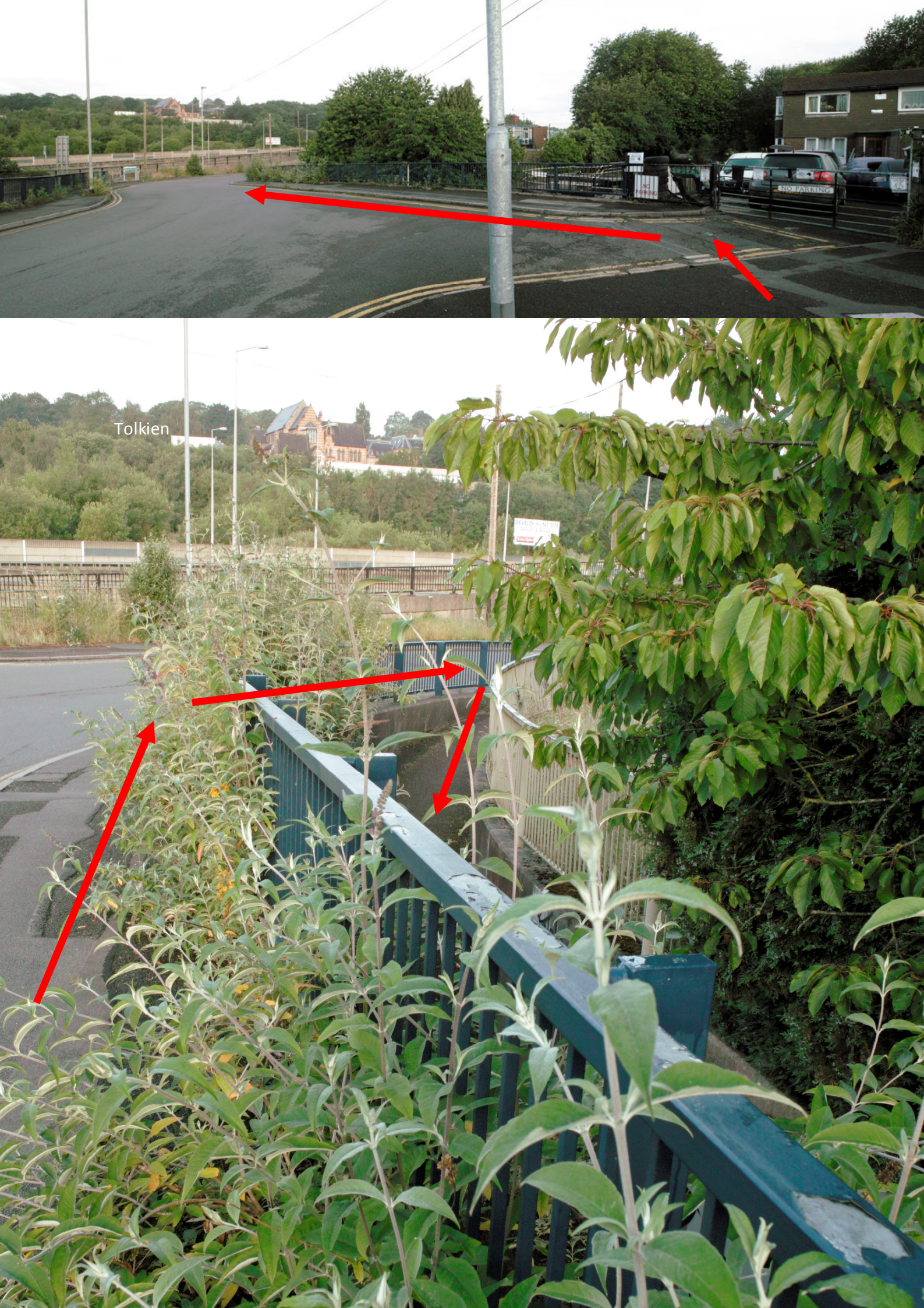
The Trent is no longer navigable into Stoke, even for a small one-man craft.

STOKE STATION

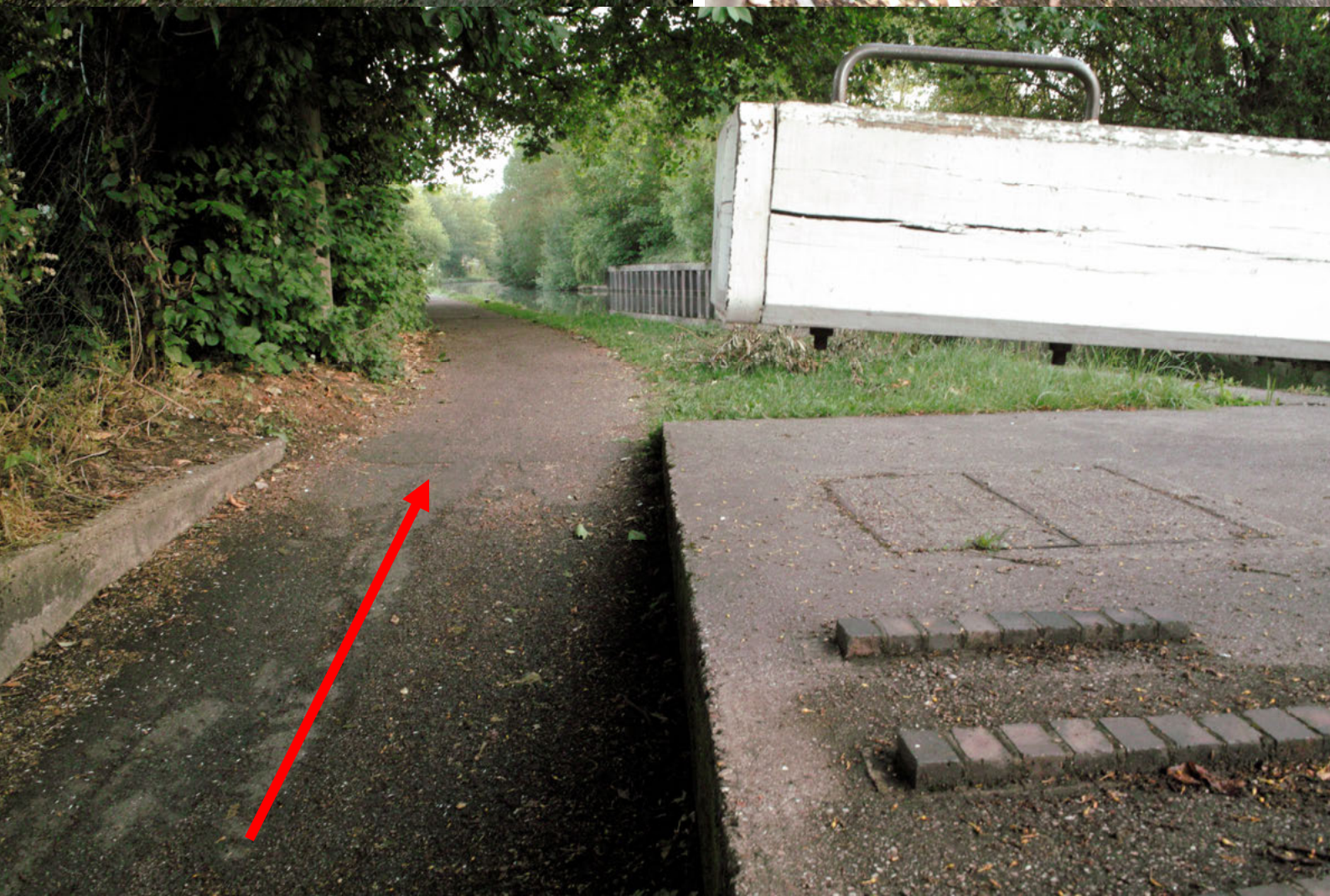
BACK ENTRANCE

Exit the station at the back (the same platform as any train arriving from the south), and walk through the car park to access the pedestrian path. The path may be overgrown, and perhaps even parked-on (the double-yellow lines are rapidly fading away) and so you should take care of possible traffic here — you may be forced out onto the roadway. At the bottom, turn right and cross over at the lights. Do NOT go under the 'low bridge'. Then, once across, carry on down the footpath that goes into the side-road.

Carry on down the footpath into the side-road. There's a canal lock-keeper's house ahead, with the canal next to it. Once at the house, turn left, and take a long hook-around to get down onto the Trent & Mersey canal and its towpath. There's a huge frozen-food warehouse further on, so watch out for lorries coming around the corner. In the distance you can see the old Catholic Convent / school in the trees — J.R.R. Tolkien stayed very near here on many 1950s-70s holidays with his son (who lived in Hartshill).


Tolkien

Yes, you're heading into a grotty bit — but it doesn't last long. Go down the sloped path, to the canal. At the bottom make sure you then turn left and then go up beside the canal lock. This is perhaps the most important turn on the walk, and if you don't make it then you'll be going quite the wrong way! At the top of the rise you'll see that you've safely made it onto the Trent & Mersey canal towpath. This is also a national cycle-path, so watch out for cyclists — this is a 'blind corner' both ways, and few 'ping' a bell.



You're now going north along the Trent & Mersey canal towpath, and are headed into the northern half of the city. The blue units glimpsed through the trees on the right, across the canal, are apparently vital in controlling the West Coast main line. Probably stuffed with computers and data cables! The 90 mile canal also once served a vital transport function — not least for our fine ceramics — but now carries many holiday narrowboats. A little further north it connects with the popular Caldon Canal to Leek.

A little further along the Trent & Mersey canal towpath you see two railway bridges ahead. The nearer one once served the old Market Drayton line — what the city would give now, to have that line open and running again and connecting quickly and easily with HS2! But today it only serves the trains which bring the clay up from Cornwall to be used in the city's ceramics factories. The other bridge carries the frequent inter-city trains that connect Manchester and Stockport with Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham.

There's a fork just before the railway bridge. But walk on, under the bridge.

SIDE LOOP: Railway historians may also want a peek at **the old Market Drayton line**, which can be accessed by the dirt track that forks off here, up some low steps. There's little to see, though, and no relics.

After the railway bridge you walk up alongside another canal lock. On the other side of the canal here is the south-west corner of the vast and very green **Hanley Cemetery**. You'll now be walking alongside the Cemetery for about a quarter of a mile. This Cemetery was once part of the grounds of the local Etruria Hall, home of the Wedgwood family of famous potters.

And not only potters! **Thomas Wedgwood** invented most of photography, quite possibly making his leaf pictures while wandering around what is now the Cemetery. Sadly he could never find a good fixative, and thus his photographs had to be kept and seen in very special conditions. A large circular plaque and bas-relief profile portrait of him adorns an entrance to the nearby Etruria Park.

SIDE VIEW

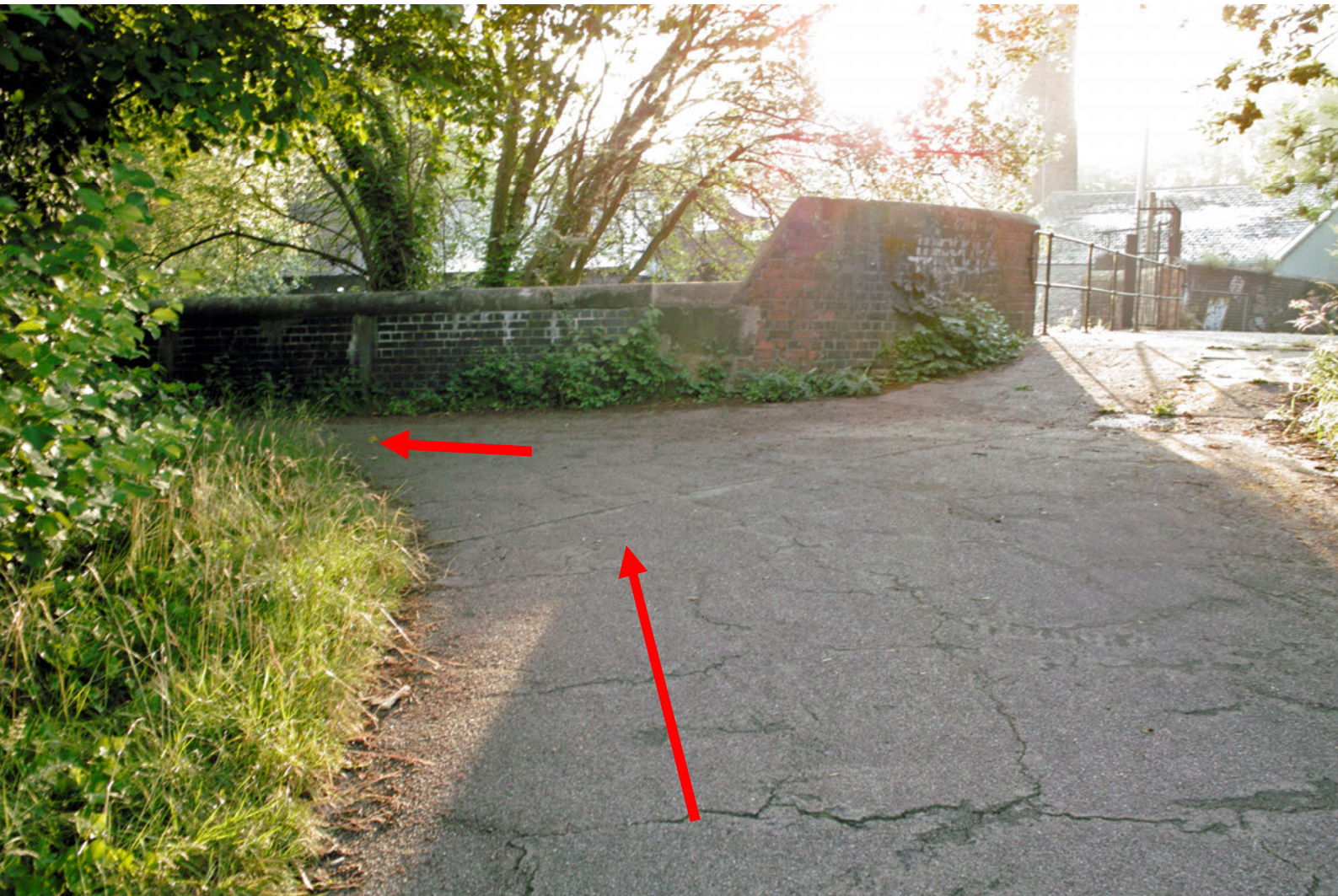
SIDE VIEW

SIDE VIEW LOCK 38

Just before Lock 38 on the canal you'll see another 'Lock 38' — the new upmarket canalside residential estate. This fronts onto the canal and includes **two magnificent bottle-kilns**. Here looking a bit weedy, it has to be said — but they do get cleaned. From these, walk back another few yards to glimpse the sweep of the Lock 38 development. The site is that of **the former Twyford's** —a great many of the **world's first ceramic toilets** were made right here, to the great relief of those who then used the new innovation!

SIDE VIEW

After going under another bridge, and up alongside the ‘real’ canal Lock 38, you’re back onto the canal again (left-hand picture). Note the wild little mini-garden, made by volunteers and mentally disabled young people with the help of the Canal & Rivers Trust. The rustic ‘beetle-bank’ seen here collects various suitable sticks that fall onto the towpath. A little further on you’ll see a rusty old bridge and a fork in the path. It doesn’t matter which fork you take, but taking the left hand one will get you high enough for a good look down on what’s ahead — the **Etruria Industrial Museum**. The path hooks around and onto the rusty bridge. Don’t go across the bridge. Instead swing left and down into a verdant and shady dip. From that point you can get a good view down and across the west side of the Museum. This is the last working steam-powered potters mill in Great Britain. Jesse Shirley's 1857 Bone and Flint Mill worked commercially to 1972.



SIDE VIEW

JAMES BRINDLEY

Yes, Stoke-on-Trent has waterfalls, of a sort. The canal lock-gates often pour out a tall torrent of white foaming water. And since there are five locks on this stretch of the Trent & Mersey, there's a fairly good chance you'll encounter more than one of our 'waterfalls' in action.

The sound of rushing water brings me to a certain delicate question that some readers may be interested in — "are there any toilets on the route?" Well, here's a likely list:

Stoke-on-Trent Railway Station — yes, toilets are available on both platforms (north bound and south bound).

Etruria Industrial Museum — yes, the Visitor Centre has toilets, but the place is only very rarely open. However, it has recently (late spring 2023) been officially transferred to volunteers, so that may change in future.

Toby Carvery — yes, but I'm guessing they may expect you to be a customer.

Westport Lake — yes, at the Visitor Centre cafe. Unlikely to be unlocked before about 10.15am, and the place currently closes early in the afternoon even in summer.

Tesco ASDA — yes, freely available and open long hours.

The Etruria Industrial Museum also has a large bin-yard with public access. You can see it in to the right in the above picture — the wooden wall. Thus, if you do happen to spot a particularly manky bag of rubbish in the hedge here, it's very easy to get rid of it quickly.

SIDE LOOP: From the top of the rise seen in the above picture, it's possible to turn right and go along the front of the Museum. Just past the bin-sheds is a traditional blacksmith who may be open and hammering away. Beyond that is the Museum, which is best visited when the place is 'in steam' and the **steam-engines** are running. Out front are some residential narrowboats.

Across the water is a fine garden for the old people's home — with a central statue of **James Brindley** to be seen, engineer and inventor of canal locks. After his apprenticeship he first opened a wheelwright business in Leek and then moved on to bigger wheels, opening a millwright shop in Burslem. Local businessmen recognised his talents and soon he was an engineer as well as a millwright. Then he took his first work on canals, helping to build the Bridgewater Canal (1761). He went on to become a major surveyor and canal-builder. His home was at Turnhurst, at Packmoor in the north of Stoke-on-Trent, now the modern pub 'Brindley's Lock'.

Back on the main path again. Sweep up and around the final lock on this stretch. Notice the cobbles and the various plants growing on the stonework here. At the top of the rise, you have a very long straight section — but this is far from boring. You will be kept highly entertained by the many and varied back-gardens that can be seen over the water, often with eccentric ornaments!

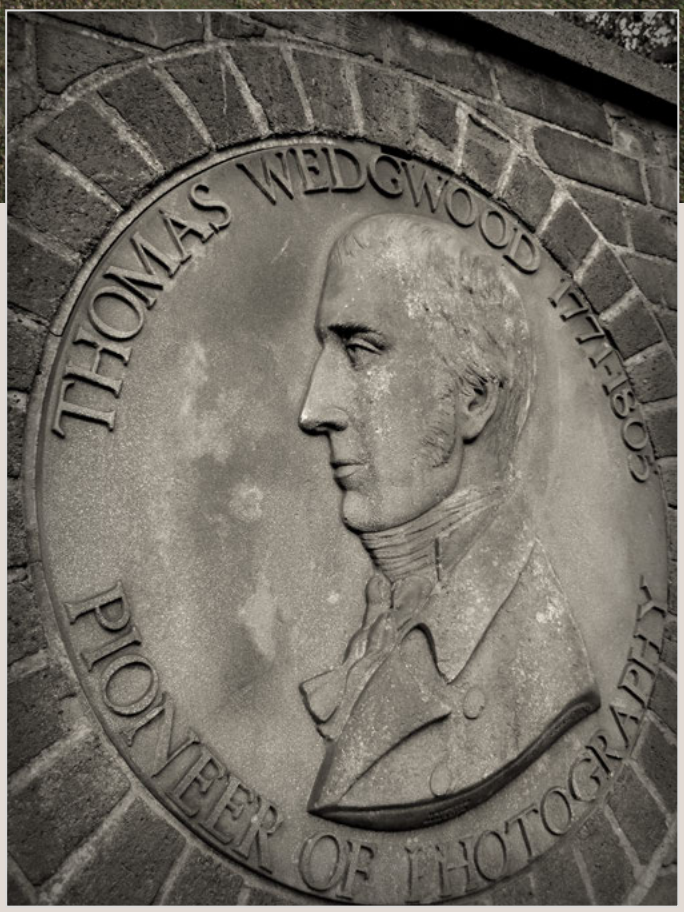
There are moorings on the Trent & Mersey here, and as well as the **painted narrowboats** you can also look at the many and varied (and some rather eccentric) **back-gardens** that back onto the canalside. At bright times this stretch of waterside can be quite dazzling, and you may need sunglasses — depending on which direction you're going in and the time of day. If you **stop here and look back** for a moment, you'll see the **junction with the Caldon Canal** (aka Cauldon) that takes boaters up to the town of Leek.

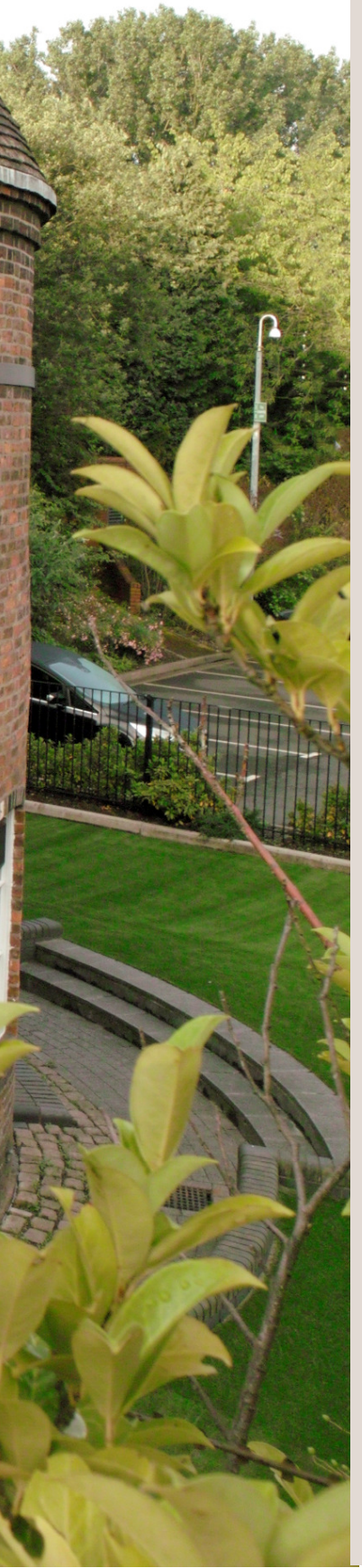
Here we see an **early morning fisherman** — of the feathered variety. A heron will sometimes let you get quite close, before flapping off with their big slow wings. Also to be seen here are many child-friendly mallard ducks, Canada geese, and often a swan. Moorhens and coots tend to prefer the bits you've already come through, and you may already have startled a few of these. So far as I know there are no mammals — such as water voles, otters and the like. But plenty of birds, and often their young broods.

After a long straight stretch of tow-path you see these steps.

SIDE LOOP: Those interested in the history of photography may want to hop up the steps and then turn right and go across the bridge. After a few hundred yards by the busy main road (a relatively pleasant footpath) you will come to the entrance to Etruria Park and to the large round memorial **plaque to Thomas Wedgwood**. Then re-trace your footsteps to the canal. The traffic alongside you is headed to the Basford Bank, the notorious and steep bottleneck by which cars access the adjacent town of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

SIDE LOOP: The **Holy Inadequate pub** — one of the best in the city — is just a short walk away. Up the first set of steps, then down the ramp-path, over into the little park with the giant steel chess pieces, look for the post-box, and then go down the side 'feeder' road to the bottom.





Once under the road bridge, don't go tromping past the somewhat hidden **Roundhouse** on your left. This is tucked away in the corner of what is now the Bet365 complex, and is easy to miss if you're walking north. It was formerly in the corner of the **Wedgwood factory**, and thus is key relic of the Industrial Revolution. It can be seen quite well from the side of the towpath, and has been restored.

Yes, the already-hungry and eagle-eyed walker will spot the sign for a **Toby Carvery** through the trees! This was formerly the China Gardens, and some locals still know it as that today. But to reach it you should carry on the way you're already headed — there's a bridge up ahead which will swing you over and into its car-park. On the right of the picture (behind the hedge) is the city's **narrowboat marina**, which narrowboat enthusiasts may think is be worth a circular tour after eating at the Toby Carvery.

TOBY

A little further on, watch out for this blind bend. Cyclists can shoot down the slope and out around the bushes with little warning — and may surprise unwary walkers. Walkers who may be looking across the canal at **the swing-bridge** and the **view over the marina**. Naturalists may also note a rich profusion of bushy but **delicate waterside plants** found here in summer. Perhaps these like the extra sun being bounced up from the wide water? The canal is wide here, so as to enable the narrowboats to turn.

Head up onto the bridge. From the middle of the bridge there are views back south–west to Bet365 — today Stoke's biggest employer, offering many highly skilled online technology jobs. Tree lovers will enjoy this stretch, with a stand of **maturing Scots pine** seen on the walk up to the bridge, and then a fine **young oak** on the other side of the bridge. The bridge takes you down to the Toby Carvery car-park. If walking on from here, you hook around the end of the bridge and go down onto the canal again.

You are now on the south west corner of the Festival Park site, former home to the **National Garden Festival** 1986. Here you can have a meal and a drink at the Toby Carvery, and perhaps a wander around the marina. You should find that the Carvery is especially keen to feed you on a Saturday and Sunday... if you **have a booking**. You should also be able to get a large all-you-can eat breakfast at a good price at other times (Monday-Friday, open 8am then breakfast "until 11am" at present, currently £6). "Free drink" when you sign up to their email newsletter! Ginger Beer supply: uncertain.

Got a picnic lunch? You'll have noticed the distinct absence of seats and benches so far. While it's possible to sit on the canal lock-bars you've already passed, this is not always ideal — damp after rain, bird poo from the robins and thrushes, or in just use by boaters. You get the idea. You're best walking just a bit further, to find somewhere to sit.

SIDE LOOP: Nearby is the giant family fun-baths called **Waterworld**, for the rare walker who combines walking and swimming!

SIDE LOOP: Those visiting the **Chambers of Commerce** (perhaps as a speaker at a business event) will find that this is also very nearby. Just a hundred yards or so 'up the side-road' from the Toby Carvery.

CONNECTOR PATH: You also leave the canal here if you're following 'The Two Saints Way', a mapped long-distance footpath that takes you up and over the nearby Festival Park site. It's a newly crafted 92-mile "pilgrim's path" connecting the cathedral cities of Lichfield and Chester. A full guide has been published.

But... assuming you are walking on, then you go down the path that takes you benath the level of the bridge you just crossed, and back down onto the canal. Here you then turn right and GO UNDERNEATH the bridge. This puts you onto the path that goes past the many business that have made Festival Park and the Etruria Valley their home in the last few decades. Such as Doulton, Vodaphone, Wade and many more.

Then up onto another bridge. Note the many small fern like plants that make this interior wall of the bridge their home. On the other side of this bridge (seen on the opposite page) you'll find a long low stone buttress on which you can sit without causing any problems to passing walkers or cyclists. Here you can enjoy your bacon cobs and a flask of tea for twenty minutes. It's also relatively sheltered from all but a bitter north wind whipping across the Cheshire Plain and down the valley — though a cool north wind will often be the case.

As you can see opposite in the 'before and after' pictures, the National Garden Festival 1986 made quite a difference to parts of the city and kick-started its overall on-going regeneration.

As the world's heavy industries failed or changed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was thought best to get de-industrialisation done quickly, and clean up the worst sites with Garden Festivals. In Stoke-on-Trent, the task was to clean up the Shelton Bar steelworks. This had been closed as a steel producer under Labour in 1978. The incoming Conservative government, initially aided greatly by local Conservative councillor Cyril Finney, brought the National Garden Festival to Stoke-on-Trent.

The site had once been one of the most lovely in the county in the 1820s, but had made iron into the 1890s and thereafter made steel. Imagine it also threaded with gas-pipes, coal shafts and pit-heads, spoil heaps the size of large hills, depots, yards, works rail lines, gas-works, and more. Then regularly cover the lot with smoke from the ceramics factories. You get the idea.

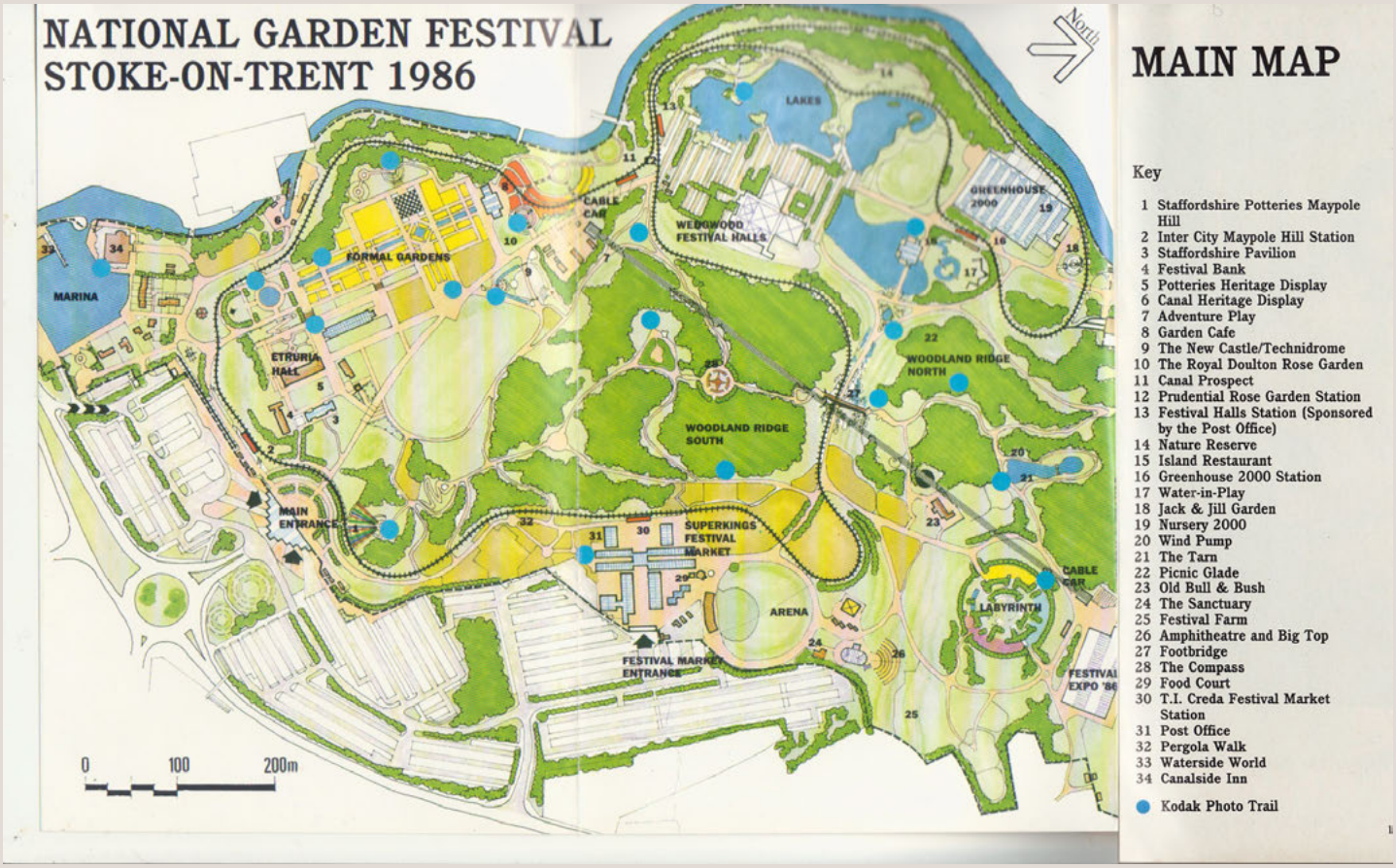
It's been an incredible story of clean up and regeneration, which shows what can be done by nature + man + energy within just 30 years. But it's a story that's too involved to go into here. Suffice it to say that a great clean-up job was then marred by atrocious wet and windy weather during the public viewing. Still, it's turning out rather nicely now, nearly 40 years on!

All the heavy industry is gone today, with only a few relic bridges, and a few mine-shafted (Cockshute Sidings) and gas contaminated yards (such as the former gas-holder site near the Holy Inadequate pub, Etruria) left untouchable. The Garden Festival site now employs far more people than in the days of heavy industry, more pleasantly, and with far more chances for training and promotion. Also with far better housing nearby.

Behind the hedges on the canal the city still has its fair share of scrap-yards and tyre dumps, and you may have heard some of them as you walked along. Or seen them, in winter. But even these are slowly going. It's a long process, but nature and 'global greening' are helping, and the Stoke of 2086 should just about have accomplished the grand regeneration... after a century.

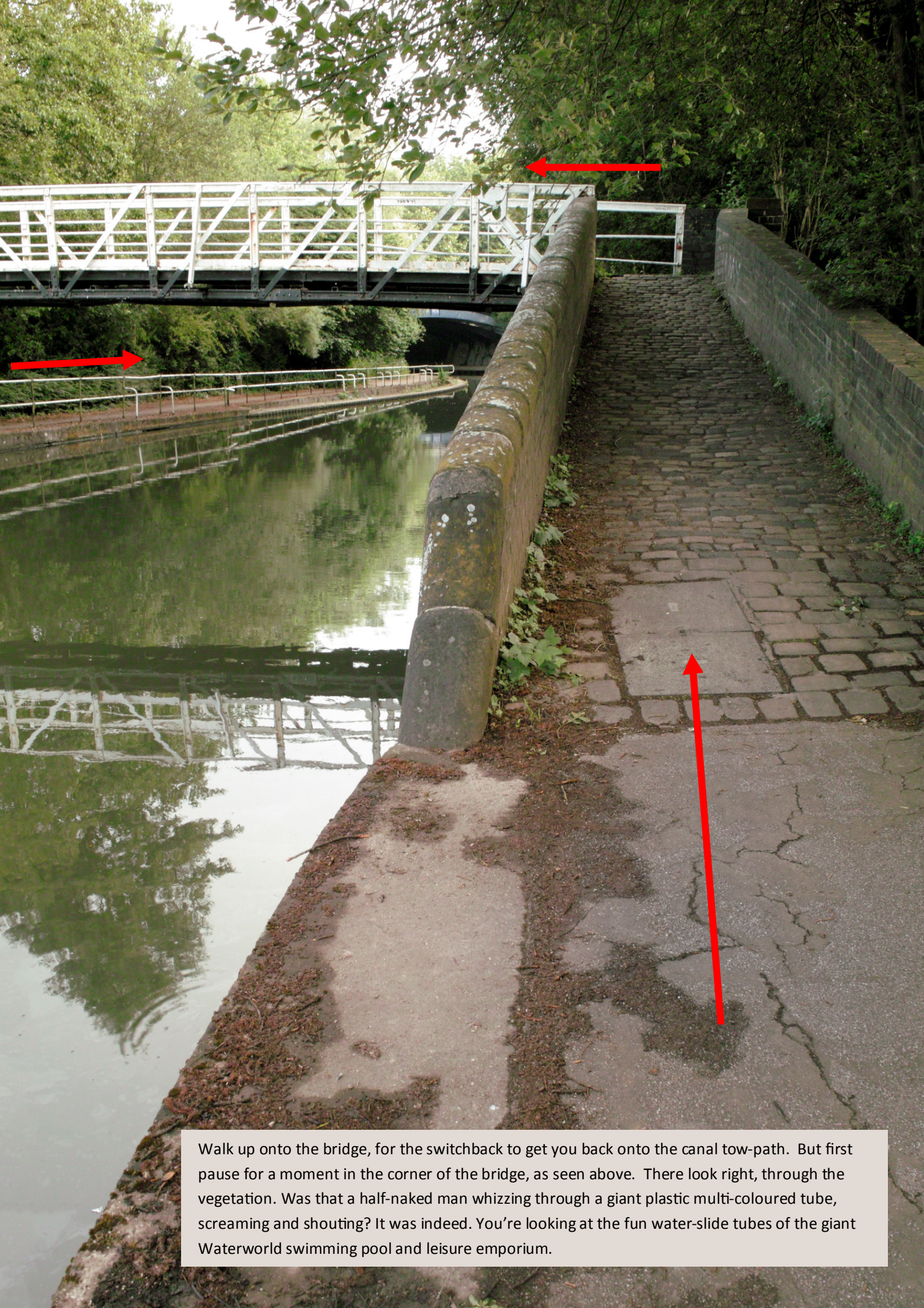
There are still sites to rent in the **Etruria Valley**, as the business part is now known, and this has recently been expanded up to Middleport, on the long awaited expansion onto the site of the old Shelton Bar steel rolling mill. This has been aided by the arrival of the new valley-spanning £42m road connecting Wolstanton with Festival Park. Contact the Chambers of Commerce if you're interested in the many opportunities.

On the opposite page (lower picture) you may spot a discreet waterside sign for the **Doulton Showroom**. Doulton being famous pottery makers. But if you visit make sure you ask if it's 'Made in Stoke'!



BEFORE

AFTER



Walk up onto the bridge, for the switchback to get you back onto the canal tow-path. But first pause for a moment in the corner of the bridge, as seen above. There look right, through the vegetation. Was that a half-naked man whizzing through a giant plastic multi-coloured tube, screaming and shouting? It was indeed. You're looking at the fun water-slide tubes of the giant Waterworld swimming pool and leisure emporium.

On the left-hand turn here is a path that could lead you to either Vodaphone or Waterworld. But the walker should keep going ahead, and toward the new bridge that takes Forge Lane over the Trent & Mersey. Just beyond its massive curved beams you can see one of the few relics of the industrial past, the old green rail bridge and buttresses. After this you enter into 'big shed' territory — dull warehouse 'boxes', which are at least set to be surrounded by some new-planted vegetation.

SIDE VIEW

The ‘big box’ warehouses and their new-planted greenery will soon obscured what used to be sweeping views down the valley. These views had been opened up for about 15 years by the demolition of the vast battle-ship sized Shelton Bar Steel Rolling Mill, and by the cleaning and rectifying of that site circa 2006. In the distance you can see the wooded western side of the wide valley, with the new £42m valley-spanning road visible as a grey smudge of railings.

SIDE VIEW

Ahead in the mist is the canal bridge for the new £42m Etruria Valley Link Road, linking Wolstanton and Festival Park. There is an on-ramp here for the canal, though a pedestrian using the road to try to reach the giant Marks & Spencer's at Wolstanton will find access to M&S has some challenges. In the inset picture above, we see a drone view of this end of the road, and the 'wiggling' of a nearby channel — done to benefit local wildlife. With thanks to Ash Thomas Films for the drone film-still.

The ‘Middleport bend’, as the canal curves around toward the Burslem Canal Arm (now dry) and Middleport. Across the canal is a little fisherman’s paradise, or it would be if someone fished out the beer cans and hauled away an old shopping trolley. ‘Up top’ is Grange Park, a large green space not as pretty as Festival Park, but linked to it and greening up nicely. There are excellent views from the top ridge on the Grange, overlooking the canal, though the tracks up there can be very muddy.

SIDE VIEW

Hurrah, you have reached **Middleport**. The off-path on the left goes up to the foot of Middleport and into Newport Lane. This NOT the off-ramp to take if you're headed to Middleport Pottery! Carry on along the towpath and go under the Newport Lane bridge. Ahead you'll see a sandy 'cliff' that marks the start of the old pottery tips. Stop where the cameraman is, and look right and across the canal — to see two rather unusual ceramics kilns.

Oliver's Mill, and two old disused flint-calcining kilns. The use of flint in pottery making was discovered in 1720 by John Astbury of Shelton (near to Stoke railway station). He used it to create beautiful 'cream stoneware' ceramics. When later added to tiles the flint 'slop' made them far more durable and finely textured, thus enabling the city to develop its fine tiles industry. The process of converting or 'calcining' the flint became a process that demanded highly-skilled kiln workers.

SIDE VIEW

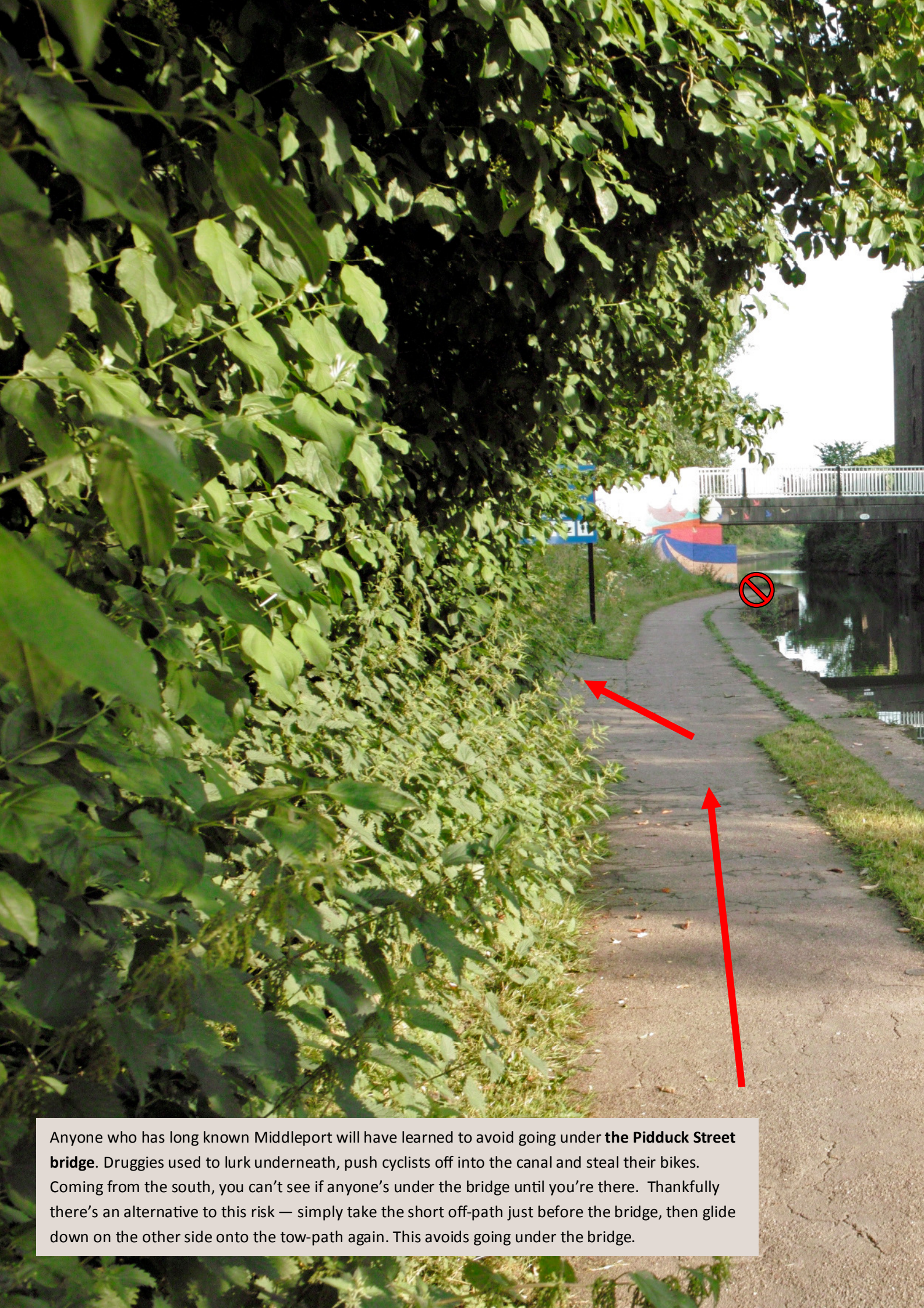
Primitive man is still to be seen lurking among his daubed pictographs, along the waterside at Middleport! I'm joking, but Middleport has long had a certain reputation in this regard, and there are a few who still think about the place and its people that way. But Middleport is now a much safer place than it used to be, though it's still wise to take care on this stretch. It used to be quite hairy, about the decade 1998-2008, but much has changed since then.

SIDE VIEW

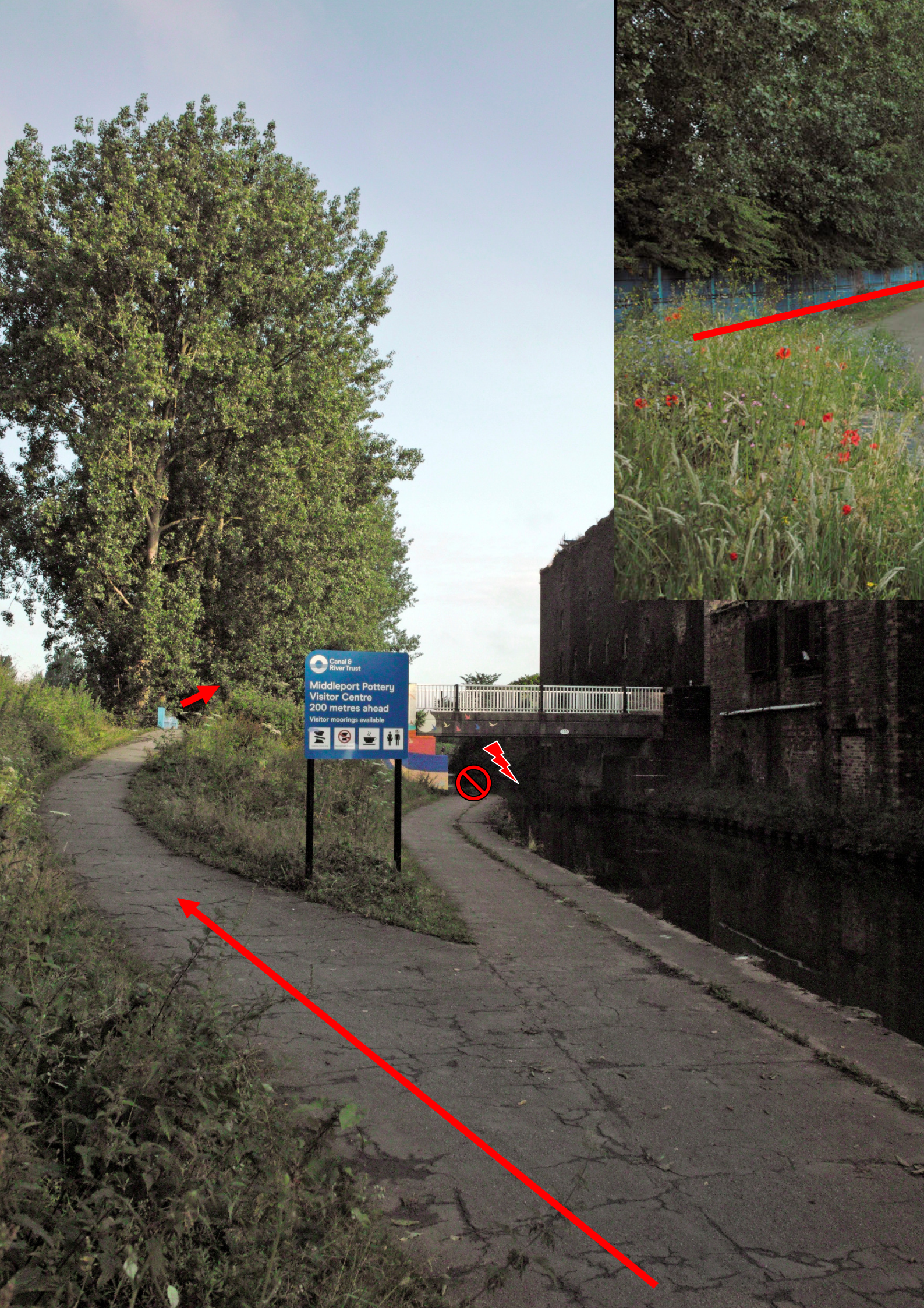
New waterside flats at Middleport. They're looking directly west, but are blocked from most of the afternoon sun by the 'hill' of the ceramics tip and its many increasingly tall trees. The combined effect of the trees and the flats make this a bit of a gloomy canyon, especially at dusk. At various points along here you can peer through and see a **superbly built back-wall** of very fine-laid dry-stone walling — though it's now becoming increasingly obscured by vegetation and the gloom.

You'll have noticed the **black marker posts**, artistic relics of the first 1990s regeneration effort such as the paving of the canal towpath to create a bicycle path. Behind is the slope of the **pottery waste tip**, now increasingly overgrown. One used to be able to find perfectly sound cups and saucers here, for free, only slightly chipped. Today you can still get through and onto the tip, and can see pottery weathering out of bare slopes — but a few old shards are all that is likely to be found now.

The foot of **Middleport Park**, which was a dangerous place circa 2003 (cyclists could be pelted with stones by small boys, or sometimes fired at with air-gun pellets by bigger ones). The towpath could also be littered with broken glass. But it's now rather more sedate. Still, it will still pay to be wary of what's coming up, and not be misled by the Park's beauty… you'll very soon reach the notorious Pidduck Street bridge.



Anyone who has long known Middleport will have learned to avoid going under **the Pidduck Street bridge**. Druggies used to lurk underneath, push cyclists off into the canal and steal their bikes. Coming from the south, you can't see if anyone's under the bridge until you're there. Thankfully there's an alternative to this risk — simply take the short off-path just before the bridge, then glide down on the other side onto the tow-path again. This avoids going under the bridge.


Canal & River Trust
Middleport Pottery
Visitor Centre
200 metres ahead
Visitor moorings available

Here we see in detail this “up and over” at the Pidduck Street bridge, which avoids going under the notorious bridge. The avoidance may be especially important at certain times of day and night. Some work has been done to ‘pretty-fy’ the site and thus make it unappealing to lurkers, but it will still pay to take care here.

SIDE LOOP: One can however cross the bridge if one wants to visit **Middleport Pottery**, a Grade II* listed pottery works and is the last British working Victorian ‘pot bank’ in continuous production. The bridge is the only feasible access from the canal towpath.

The Middleport Pottery site has changed very little since Victorian times, and has attractions including tours and a tea-rooms, and a new restored terrace house opposite. No, that’s not Middleport Pottery you see looming like some ‘dark satanic mill’ on the right.

SIDE LOOP (long!): This bridge is also the best off-point if you’re headed up **into Burslem**. Go across Middleport, down across the dry bed of the Burslem Canal Arm, up the side of Rogerson’s Meadow, across to the path alongside Burslem churchyard, and then through the churchyard and up Bournes Bank into Burslem, to emerge near the School of Art.

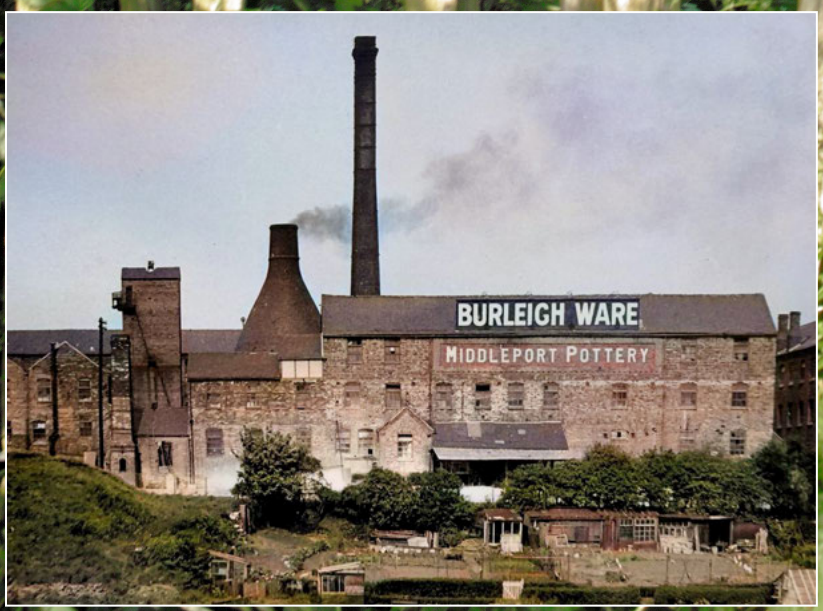
SIDE LOOP: By going off to the left and down, at the topmost point of your short ‘up and over’ detour, and walking thirty yards, you cross the **Fowlea Brook**. The view of it is better in winter. The Brook was once highly polluted, but 25 years of conservation efforts — still on-going — have greatly improved the water. The Brook flows south to join the Trent at Stoke Minster.

This is the Brook that once gave its name to the valley — the Fowlea Valley, now better known by the business name of Etruria Valley. The name Fowlea probably comes from Fowl Hay, with fowl referring to game water-birds — the whole valley was once well know for its rich and varied bird-life…

“[In the 1820s-30s] some parts may be described as wild [and at Etruria] the rushes that grew here were a favourite resort for curious birds in winter, and now and then even sea birds would find their way to the place. One thing helped to make it a safe shelter for such visitors — the [Fowlea] brook that runs through the valley would sometimes, after heavy rain, be swollen to a lakelet, filling the whole meadows, and even finding its way to the doors of the cottages.”

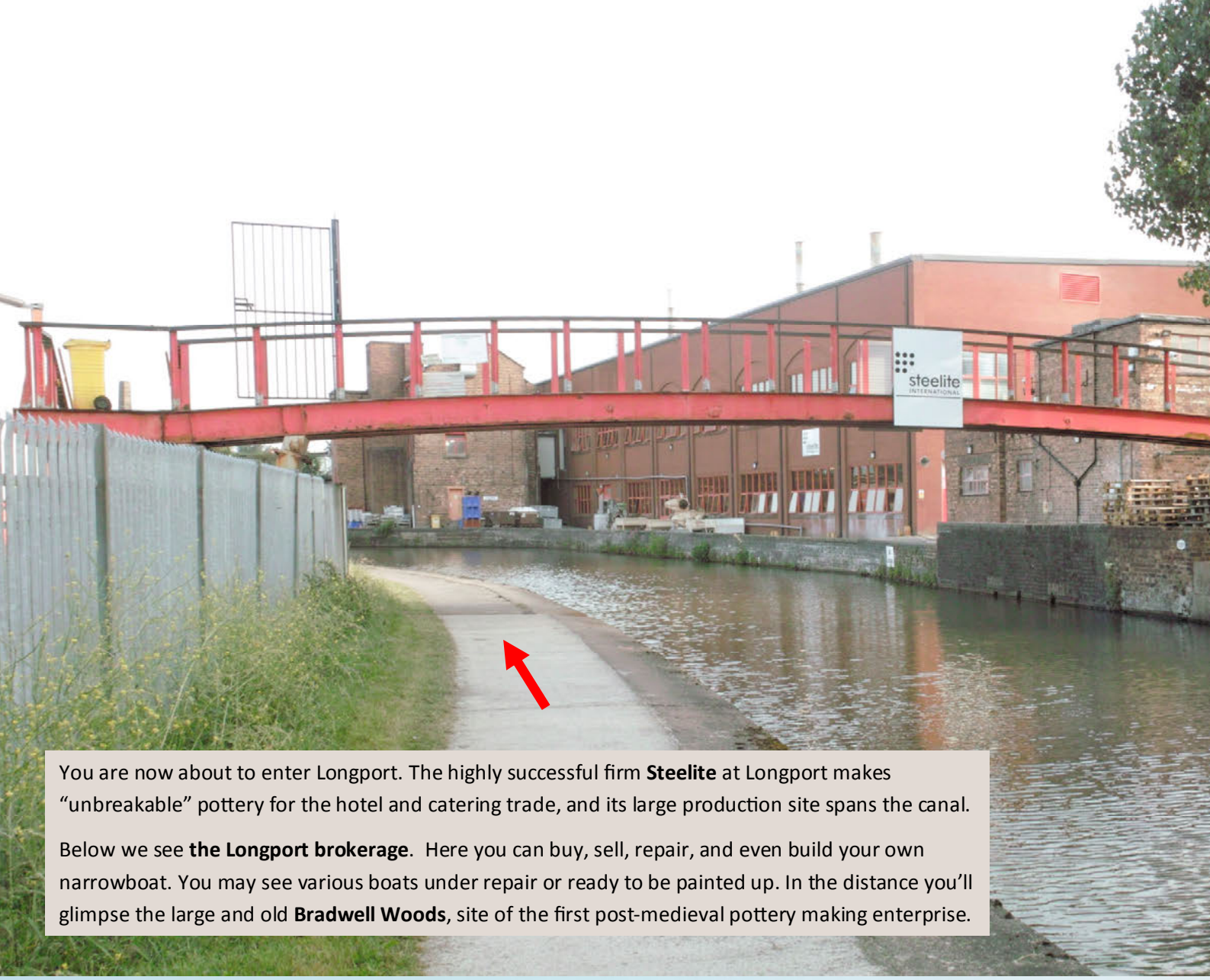
— from *People of the Potteries*, being memories of Stoke-on-Trent in the 1820s and 30s.

Here you can peep through at **the allotments** that sit between the canal and the Fowlea Brook. A little further on you encounter the restored **Middleport Pottery**, and that very rarest of features — **a seat!** The narrowboat is the pottery's own, called **The Dane** (after the river that forms the northern border of Staffordshire).



MIDDLEPORT POTTERY

Longport
FESTIVAL PARK
CITY CENTRE
Middleport Park
Middleport Pottery



You are now about to enter Longport. The highly successful firm **Steelite** at Longport makes "unbreakable" pottery for the hotel and catering trade, and its large production site spans the canal.

Below we see **the Longport brokerage**. Here you can buy, sell, repair, and even build your own narrowboat. You may see various boats under repair or ready to be painted up. In the distance you'll glimpse the large and old **Bradwell Woods**, site of the first post-medieval pottery making enterprise.

CORDELIA
WISHBONE

Here you are now in the industrial bit of Longport — more derelict pot banks by the canal, and a big cement factory just up ahead. Note the sign to **Longport train station**, off to the left and down the slope a bit. It's very nearby, and will be happy to whisk you back to Stoke station in 10 minutes if needed. Last time I looked you could pay on the hourly local train, and the single fare was about £2. While you're waiting, check out the **Chimney Pot Shop**— it sells old antique ceramic chimney pots!

Yes, we do have a few bits of grot to see, as you head further north through Longport. But this is the last of it before Tunstall, and you have to admit that this decrepit **Price & Kensington works** at Longport (aka Top Bridge Pottery) can make a somewhat picturesque black and white photograph. The Price & Kensington brand is still well known, but the manufacturing has long since moved away. Various hopes and even plans have been mooted for the old site, but they always seem to come to nothing. Still, it'll happen one day.

Somewhere around here was where the first sod was cut for the new Trent & Mersey Canal. This is on the logical principle that the many financial backers would need park up their coach and horses, and the best place for that would be the Trubshaw Cross — long the gathering point of the Peak's packhorse drivers before they crossed the Fowlea Brook and headed up the valley side to the London Road at Newcastle-under-Lyme. Trubshaw Cross is just on the other side of the Price & Kensington site, though the ancient stone cross has long since gone. Assuming Wedgwood's backers were parked at that wide and flat spot, they — being old men by the standards of their time — would not want to walk far over rough and perhaps damp ground to reach the site for the ceremony of the cutting of the first turf for the canal. Thus, **the spot where the Trent & Mersey was 'born'** can't be very far away from where you now stand.

It's not a good idea to walk up to Burslem from here, as you'd have to slog along a main road. See my earlier Pidduck Street bridge pages in this photo-guide, for details on how best to walk the 'back way' into Burslem. Anyway... Burslem is really quite another visit and walk, and only really of interest to the historian or the fan of the writer Arnold Bennett. By the way, Bennett's long story and masterpiece "Simon Fuge" is a more approachable introduction to his work and style than the novels.

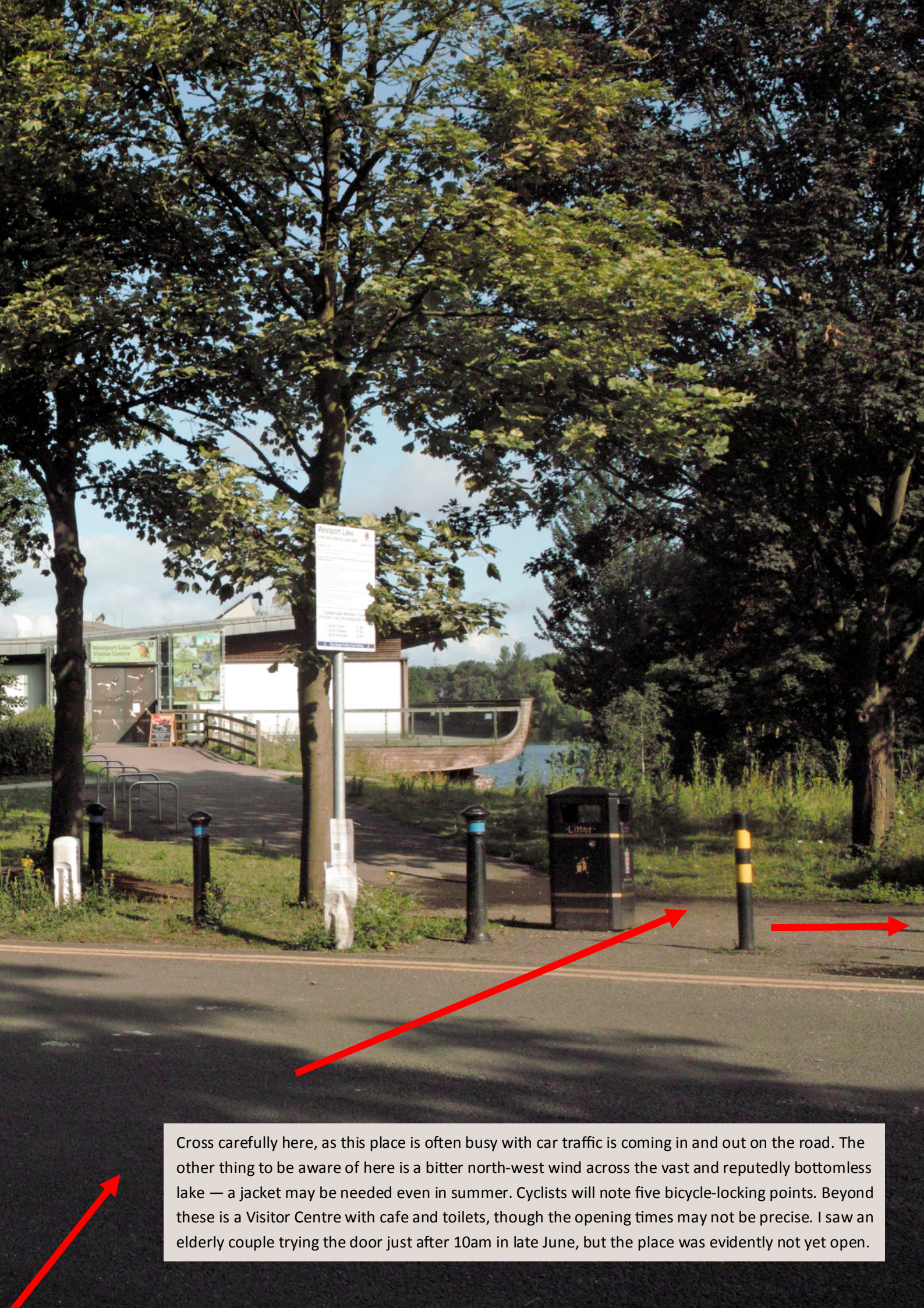
CONNECTOR PATH: By stepping down to Longport Station from here, you then can go across the pedestrian railway bridge and behind the station and thus access the long steep steps that go up through the woods on the valley side. You emerge near the Cemetery, and can then persue my ridge-walk north through the Bradwell Woods and (with a bit of slipping and sliding in wet weather) get down and then across via farm-track footpath to the field-path footpath to Bathpool Park. From there you can reach Kidsgrove train station via the further woodland path and the canal. Be warned that this is not an official path, and it not one the try in or after wet weather!

From Longport or Kidsgrove Station, a northbound local train will take you to Congleton for a walk up and around **Mow Cop** — the local highest point and with sweeping views over the varied landscape.

TRUBSHAW CROSS, BURSLEM.

With the grot and cement yard left behind, you're about to reach **Westport Lake**. When you see the black-and-white striped bridge, you're approaching it. This where you leave the canal and walk up to the visitor centre. If you don't care to go on up to Tunstall, this could be your destination, perhaps with a (very long, and often windswept) walk around the huge lake and a look at the nature reserve at the back — said to be a prime bird-watching spot when not disturbed by dog walkers.

OPENING TIMES.
MON-FRI 10-3.30
Hot food Served Until 3pm.
WEEKENDS, BANK HOLIDAYS &
SCHOOL HOLIDAYS
10.00-4.00
Hot food Served Until 3.15pm.



Cross carefully here, as this place is often busy with car traffic is coming in and out on the road. The other thing to be aware of here is a bitter north-west wind across the vast and reputedly bottomless lake — a jacket may be needed even in summer. Cyclists will note five bicycle-locking points. Beyond these is a Visitor Centre with cafe and toilets, though the opening times may not be precise. I saw an elderly couple trying the door just after 10am in late June, but the place was evidently not yet open.

You may find a traditional '99 cornet' ice-cream van parked back in the car-park, in the high summer and early autumn.

Now head on a few paces and up onto the bridge. Once on the bridge, pause and look back for a view of the side of the Visitor Centre cafe (this will also give you an indication of how busy it is, and if there are outdoor tables to be had), with a glimpse of the lake beyond.

The flat circular one-mile route around the vast lake is popular with local walkers, joggers and dog-walkers, but frankly it is not all that interesting. Perhaps most interesting to an ardent wildfowl watcher with a good pair of stabilised binoculars, and even then perhaps only at certain times of year when certain unusual migrant ducks and geese are to be seen.

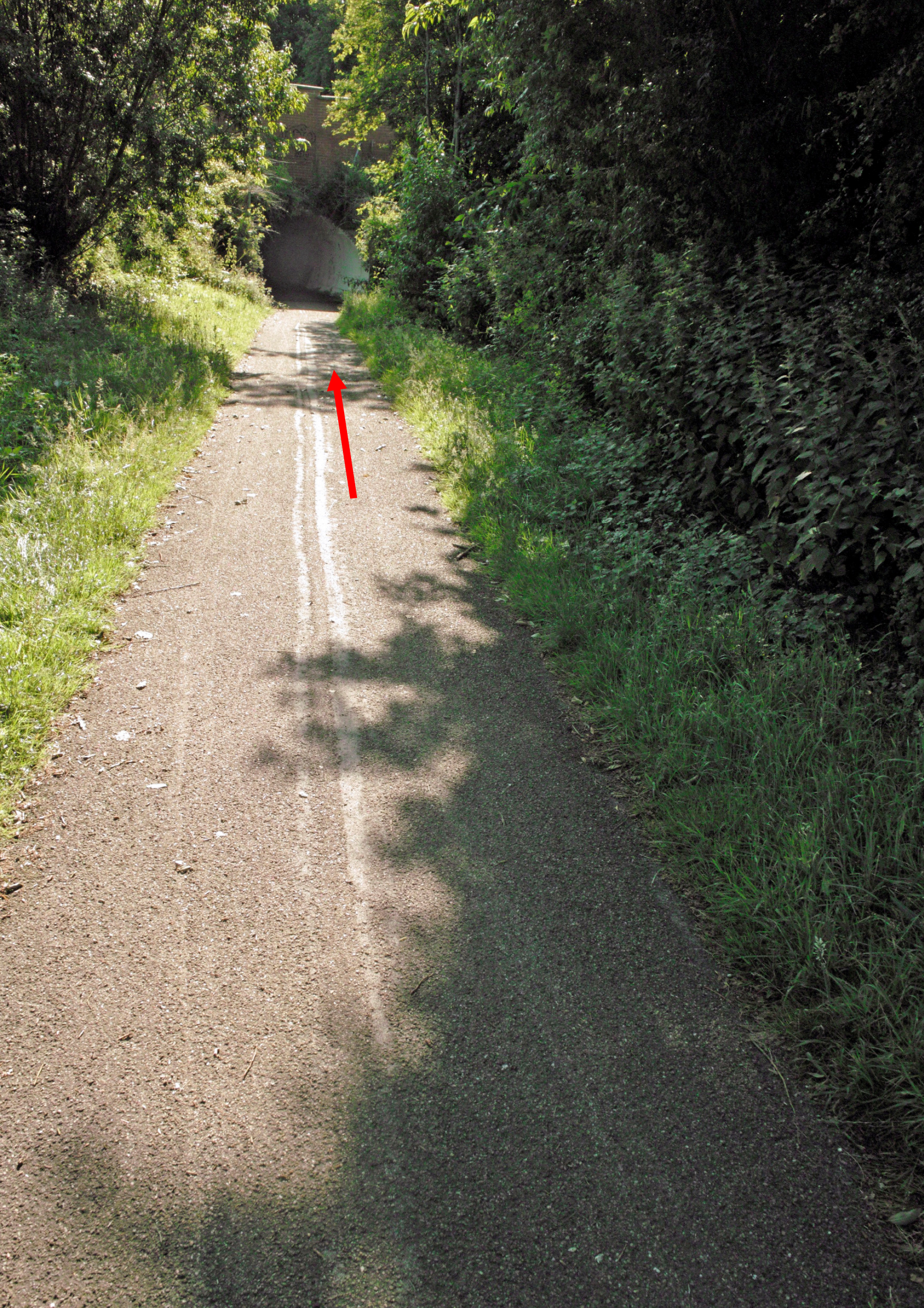
From this bridge you're on, you also get a fine view northward along the Trent & Mersey canal towpath. These safe (if often rather chilly and exposed) lakeside mooring spots are popular, as boaters either head up to or have recently emerged from the very long and dark Harecastle Tunnel that goes right through the hill to reach Kidsgrove.

For a walker, once beyond this Westport Lake area, it's then a long and not very interesting 'straight on slog' of 1.2 miles north up the towpath to Harecastle. Birdwatchers may however find some interesting side-spots if they choose to continue on. Such as the huge old sewage works, which abuts the northern side of Westport Lake and which was greening up nicely when last ventured into some years ago.

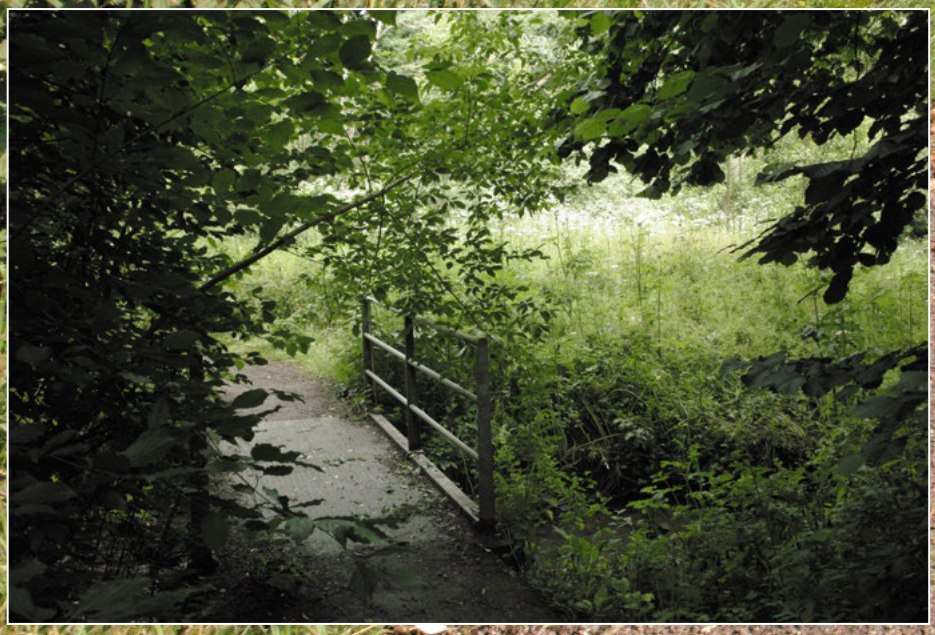
Between the Lake and the valley ridge, and hidden out of sight, is the long and notorious Chemical Lane. There some of the area's most dangerous firms work with batteries, scrap metal, recycling, fridges, chemicals, etc. Fires have been known. If you ever see a cloud of heavy black smoke rolling in from that direction, cover your mouth and head fast in the opposite direction!

Leaving the bridge and the lake behind, walk a few paces up the entrance-road to Westport Lake. But only a few paces, as you almost immediately need to cross the road again. You want to get onto that little path that starts between those two bollards. This side-road can be busy with cars eager to get to or from the lake, so take care crossing. The path in the distance is your first encounter with one of the city's many off-road 'greenways' — former industrial light-railway tracks, now tarmaced.

A straightforward hook-around, and then you descend to a rather scary-looking narrow tunnel. There will be a few of these to go through, and they're not lit, but they've very short and lack any waiting Shelobs. As with most of the towpath, greenways have no seats. There's a huge secondary school very nearby, about half way up, and you may hear the shouts and screams at play-time. Despite this nearby school, the litter situation on this greenway is now fairly good.



SIDE LOOP: A few steps after the fork you encounter a ‘crooked crossroads’. If you choose to take the left hand path seen here, there is an optional short loop down to visit the site of the old Sytch Mill. This sits in a hollow, alongside what is now known as the Scotia Brook. Below you see the little bridge that takes you across the Brook and into the hollow.



SIDE LOOP: The Sytch Mill site, near Brownhills.

The Sytch Mill stood on and was powered by the Scotia Brook, which runs on the right-hand side of the above picture. The flow of water was evidently much more than today, for the mill never lacked power. Since at least 1273 its wooden waterwheel and grindstones ground the area's corn and fodder. The grindstones came from the nearby summit of Mow Cop, supplier of Europe's best millstones since the Iron Age. The splash and creak of the millwheel is long gone today, as is the miller's house. Twenty years ago one could still see some brick walls and a few relics at the back of the site, if one sploshed across damp ground. Today nature has taken over, though in very dry weather one might venture further in. The mill passed through many owners, and was last worked as a mill in 1885.

There are no supernatural tales or legends of this hollow, or accounts of the dastardly grindings of love-rivals by one of the millers. Just an honest local service of centuries, provided year in and year out to the many farmers who then worked the rich soil of the district, and fed the local people with their daily bread.

The Victoria County History: Volume 8 (1963) has, in the 1950s, brick buildings still located here...

"for some years occupied as a house and outbuildings; [while] the former millstones have been made into a flight of steps leading up to No. 156 Westport Road, situated some 100 yards to the south-east".

No. 156 is now gone, swept away by the huge new secondary school and its grounds. It's not known if the millstones were preserved, and they do not appear to have been re-sited as a rock feature at the front of the school. Their location is now unknown.

Return from the mill hollow, if you ventured down there, and turn left onto the path you were following before. Keep on going up and up the gentle slope and around the curves, until you see the rooftops of Tunstall ahead of you. As you reach the top, the Royal Mail's Burslem Sorting Office and parcel collection counter is on the other side of the hedge on your right.

The top of the greenway path, into the backstreets of Tunstall. Note the ‘secret passage’ which goes through the hedge to the Sorting Office, without having to traipse all the way around to get there.

CONNECTOR PATH: This secret passage will also get the walker swiftly onto the nearby Burslem Greenway and thus heading south again: Burslem — Cobridge Park — cut up toward Brian O'Rourke's cycle shop — across The Grange — Festival Park — back onto the canal. If you try that route, don’t trust the signage — some signs to the Port Vale F.C. football ground are ‘turned around’ by football fans and would have you going in quite the wrong direction.

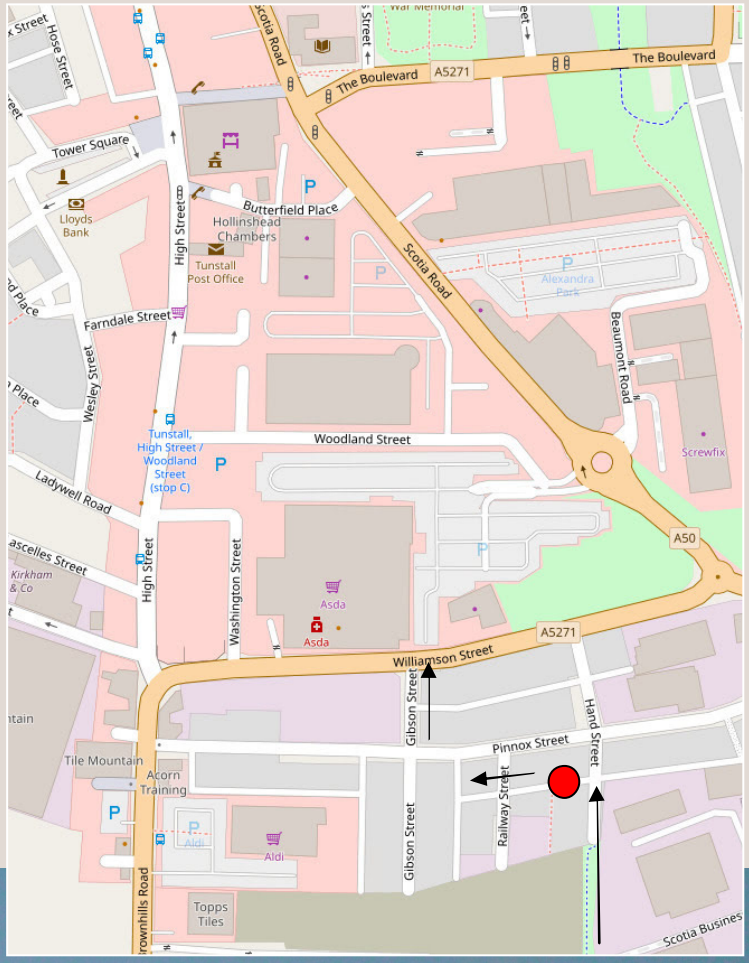
Secret passageway, to and from the Royal Mail Sorting Office. Too narrow for a bicycle.
Litter

HAND
STREET
58

Walk up the very short Hand Street, from the greenway exit point. Cross over at the end, turning left.

TUNSTALL is the first large town, in a city made up of towns and villages, that the first-time visitors will have encountered. Since you have bypassed the town of Burslem. Tunstall is the most northerly town of the city. True, the leafy town of Kidsgrove lies even further north, but that belongs to Newcastle-under-Lyme and so it is technically not part of the city. It does however form part of the local MP's constituency for Stoke-on-Trent North. As with many boundaries in the West Midlands, the borders have overlapped and criss-crossed over the centuries.

Yes, newcomers to North Staffordshire should note that you are **in the West Midlands**, which is not and never has been 'the north'. If you've just arrived from the south of England… this is **not** 'the north', though you may think the terrace houses indicate that.



You are at the red dot. With thanks to openstreetmap.org

Walk ahead, and within a few yards you'll pass the end of the Railway Street cul-de-sac. Yes, at the end of the street was one of the old industrial railways, but it never became a greenway. Carry on a bit further to a small crossroads, and look right. You'll see steps up to an ASDA on the other side of a main road. Walk up a few paces toward the busy main road, then cross the top of the side-road.

ASDA

mainline
SN64 CDG

Cross the busy main road at the pedestrian crossing. Yes, you can catch a bus just beyond the lights, and before the bus gets to the town centre — which at certain times may be an advantage in terms of getting a seat. Once safely across, head down to the flight of steps that leads up onto the ASDA car-park. ASDA does not clean the steps, and they were found to be dangerously rancid with litter.

Welcome
to your local ASDA
We're open
Mon - Fri 6am - 12am
Sat 6am - 10pm
Sun 10am - 4pm
Free cash withdrawals
ASDA
BARCLAYS
NORTH STAFFS
TYRE &
BATTERY

Grocery collection

Walk across the frontage of ASDA — and perhaps pop in to use the toilets, cafe and get some items — then after that swing around the corner and go up behind the three trolley-sheds. Here you find a pedestrian walkway across the car park, and then a ramp up into the end of the High Street and Tunstall town centre. Near the end of the ramp there's a pedestrian crossing.

Cross over this lower part of the High Street at the pedestrian crossing. You'll then be on the right side of the High Street to walk up to the Tower Square — which forms the centre of the town.

When you see the front of the constituency office and meeting rooms of Jonathan Gullis M.P. (Stoke-on-Trent North, Conservative and Unionist Party), you'll know you're on the right track.

Then go a little further up the High Street and just around the corner you will reach **the Clock Tower Square! This is the centre of Tunstall.**

AT CLOCK TOWER SQUARE:

Library

Town Hall

Indoor Market Place

Staffordshire oatcakes shop

Fish and chips shop

Wrights pie shop

Lloyds Bank

Post box for letters and cards

Iris's Cats in Need charity shop (very worthy, please patronise)

... and bicycle locking.

From Tower Square (seen left) cross to The Boulevard, for the Tunstall Greenway. This will take you four miles north, to Kidsgrove station.